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Survey of Canadian Methyl Bromide Users

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Since Canada is not a producer of methyl bromide, all methyl bromide users must hold import allowances. Consequently, the Canadian government can maintain contact with them.

During the late spring and early summer of 2000, holders of methyl bromide allowance were surveyed by telephone to ensure they were informed of the phase out schedule, to find out if they are still using methyl bromide and for what purpose, to determine their state of readiness to adopt methyl bromide alternatives and to obtain input into the needs of methyl bromide users.

Several attempts were made to contact all 106 holders of MeBr allowance. Eighty-four quota holders responded to the survey for a success rate of 79%.

Sixty-six (62%) of the 106 MeBr quota holders in Canada are classified as growers. The response rate for the survey of this group was 73%. Of the 48 respondents to the survey, 16 (33%) were still using their quota and 32 had ceased to use their quota for various reasons. Only 3 (23%) of the large quota holders indicated that they are still using their quota compared to 40% and 37% for medium and small holders, respectively. Many growers were having fairly good success with several currently registered soil fumigants, but some problems were identified. Growers also identified some products, primarily those with higher chloropicrin levels, that they would like to have tested or have registered for use.

Several growers misunderstand the risks of methyl bromide to the environment, doubt that the phase out will actually happen and have concerns that other countries will not phase out according to the same schedule. Many growers, notably a number in Quebec, were identified as having problems understanding and completing government documents; many others did not want to or could not do, the paperwork demanded of them. As a result, the list of allowance holders contains some errors and omissions.

Forty (38%) of the 106 MeBr quota holders were categorized as structural and/or commodity users. All but four holders were successfully surveyed, a success rate of 90%. Of the 36 respondents to this survey, 25 (69%) were still using their quota. This included all of the large quota holders, all but one of the medium quota holders and 54% of the small quota holders.

Many, but not all, of the companies using methyl bromide to treat structures or commodities knew of or had tried alternatives. Alternatives containing phosphine in its many forms were most commonly mentioned. Virtually all pest control companies surveyed indicated some level of dissatisfaction with the alternatives available or noted no suitable alternative was available for some or most circumstances. Many of the allowance holders indicated they were using their quota for quarantine or pre-shipment use, indicating some misinformation and/or methyl bromide import problems.

University, college, government and chemical/pharmaceutical company researchers who hold quota were also surveyed and their results are included with the structural and commodity users for statistical purposes. Most had discontinued their use of MeBr. However, some holders were using small amounts for MeBr for stratospheric and other essential research. We recommend research use not be included in the quota system so that those needs can continue to be met.